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ABSTRACT

The Process Model of Experiential Learning, expanded from Dean (1993), is based on stages adapted from Pfeiffer and Jones (1983) and assumes a group of learners working together under the guidance of a group leader or facilitator. The model consists of seven stages, each composed of four different functions: leader's role regarding the content of the learning activity; leader's role regarding the process of conducting the activity; leadership role of the participants; and learners' roles and levels of involvement in the activity. In the planning stage, the leader assesses learners' readiness to participate in the experiential learning and identifies desired outcomes and methods. The leader creates a climate for involvement by identifying the relevance of the content, process, and anticipated outcomes and introduces the activity in which participants engage. During internalization, learners are actively engaged in the learning experience; the leader's role is facilitative. During reflection, the leader encourages discussion and support; learners strive to derive meaning from the experience. During generalization, the leader helps learners develop connections between the learning activity and their work. In applications, the leader provides guidance for learners to transfer learning; learners apply their new knowledge on the job and in their communities. During follow-up, the leader assesses learners' abilities to apply new learning. (An activity is provided in which participants use the model to develop a community needs assessment procedure. The model is appended.) (YLB)

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Progress Town Analysis – An Application of the Process Model for Experiential Learning in Adult Education

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Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a term that has been used to indicate learning through doing. Its common use in adult education has been to describe internships and long-term experiential projects in which students engage as part of a larger, formal learning program. The term is used here in a broader sense as all learning that is derived from active engagement of the learner. In this sense, we are using experiential learning in the same way as Dewey (1938) who describes the dual nature of experiences in learning. Dewey emphasizes both the environmental aspects of experience and the personal or internal aspects of experience, and emphasizes the need to bridge these two components. This dual nature of experience is what gives experiential learning its power. Experiential learning is most effective when previous knowledge can be linked with current learning and future applications of that learning in a way which allows the person to fully integrate the past, present and future.

Kolb (1984) expands on Dewey's ideas of experience and education by offering the following definition of learning: "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"(p. 38). This definition emphasizes the role of experience in learning. Kolb explains his definition further by stating: 1) the definition emphasizes the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to outcomes, 2) knowledge is a transformation process, being continually created and recreated, 3) learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms, and 4) understanding the nature of knowledge is critical to understanding the nature of learning. This definition lays the foundation for the approach to learning emphasized here. The dual nature of experience is at the heart of experiential learning as it is used in the context

of this paper. Learning occurs as an "objective experience," that is, it incorporates the prior experience of the learners and the organizational structure and context in which the learning occurs. Learning is also "subjective," however, in that each learner experiences activities differently and arrives at independent conclusions about the "topic" being learned. It is the process of making these differences explicit in shared communication among the learners that offers the greatest chance of not only learning from one's own experience, but from those of others as well.

A Process Model of Experiential Learning

The model used to develop the learning activities in this context is displayed in Figure 1.1: A Process Model of Experiential Learning **(see - Appendix A).** This model, expanded from Dean (1993), is based on stages adapted from Pfeiffer and Jones (1983). The Process Model of Experiential Learning assumes a group of learners working together under the guidance of a group leader or facilitator. The facilitator assumes the leadership role in helping the group to get involved in the learning activity, to process the learning, and to apply the learning to activities on their jobs. The Process Model consists of seven stages. Each stage comprises four different functions: A) the leader's role regarding the content of the learning activity, B) the leader's role regarding the process of conducting the activity; C) the leadership role of the participants, and D) the learners' roles and levels of involvement in the activity.

The Seven Stages of the Process Model of Experiential Learning

I. In the **planning stage (Getting Ready),** the leader assesses the learners' readiness to participate in the experiential learning and identifies the desired outcomes and

methods most appropriate. The leader prepares the materials and facilities for the activity.

II. **Involvement (Getting Started).** The leader creates a climate for involvement by identifying the relevance of the content, process and anticipated outcomes. The leader introduces the activity and provides clear directions for the learners. The participants. The participants become engaged in the activity at this point.

III. **Internalization (Learning by Doing).** The learners are actively engaged in the learning experience at this stage. The leader's role is primarily facilitative at this time, focusing on managing the learning process and encouraging learner participation.

IV. **Reflection (Making Meaning).** The leader facilitates and helps the learning process by encouraging discussion and support. The learners strive to derive meaning from the experience through group consensus or individual meaning.

V. **Generalization (Making Connections).** The leader helps the learners develop connections (through brainstorming or illustrations) between the learning activity and their work, and /or communities. The learners work independently or in small groups to make connections.

VI. **Applications (Transfer of Learning).** The leader provides guidance and structure for the learners to transfer learning to real world situations, through discussions or keeping journals. The learners use connections made in the previous stage and apply their new knowledge on the job and in their organizations and communities.

VII. **Follow-up (Assessment and Planning).** The leader's role is directive and may involve formal and informal assessment tools (tests, performance evaluations, or observation, critiques, and discussion). The leader assesses the learner's abilities to apply their new learning(s). This stage lays the groundwork for future activities and subsequent changes (in the organization or community). They provide feedback regarding the success of implementing new ideas adopted as a result of the learning activity.

Analysis of the Process Model of Experiential Learning

The seven stages of experiential learning in the model are not static and may be revisited throughout the learning process. In the **planning** or first stage, the leader assesses the learners' readiness to participate in the activity (either formally or informally), and develops and prepares the learning activity.

The second stage, **involvement**, is an important time for the group leader or facilitator. Getting the learners involved by creating a climate for learning has been discussed by a number of authors including Gagne, Briggs, and Wager (1988), Draves (1984), Knox (1986), and Margolis and Bell (1986), each of whom provide insights into how to engage learners in a learning activity. Three central themes can be derived from most of the work on this topic: 1) Help the learners to see the relevance of the activity to themselves and their job, 2) Be explicit and direct about what is to be done, how it is to be done and who is to do what, and 3) Model behavior that contributes to a climate of openness and trust. The third theme is critical. If learners do not feel they can participate in the learning activity free of censure, then they are not likely to want to participate at all. If they are forced to participate, then they are not likely to want to participate at all.

If they are forced to participate, then they will play a role to meet the expectations of others instead of openly attempting to learn and grow from the experiences.

The third stage, **internalization**, is when participants are actively engaged in the learning process and doing the learning activity. The role of the leader shifts from one of director during the involvement stage to facilitator for the activity. In this role, the leader encourages participation, clarifies directions, and helps learners maintain motivation to keep on task.

The next two stages, **reflection** and **generalization**, are often combined. In these stages, sometimes referred to as debriefing, participants are encouraged to reflect on the learning activity, develop a sense of what it means to them, and make connections between the learning activity and other activities such as job functions. The important aspect of these stages is that learners must make their own meaning and connections; they must not be told what the meanings and connections are. Again, the leader is primarily a facilitator in these stages, allowing the learners to develop their own sense of what can be learned from the activity as well as how it applies to their jobs.

In the sixth stage, **application**, participants are encouraged to apply what they have learned to their job in a concrete and real way. This stage may be accomplished in many different ways. For example, learners may brainstorm ways their jobs or the organization can be improved based on what they have learned. They may decide to develop a long-term approach to developing new methods or procedures for the organization. Even restructuring the organization may be seen as a desirable outcome if the learners believe that is appropriate.

Follow-up is the last stage of the learning activity and is inherent in any good learning situation. The leader assesses the impact of changed behavior and /or activities on the while learners provide feedback regarding the success of implementing new ideas adopted as a result of the learning activity. This stage lays the groundwork for future learning activities and subsequent changes in the organization.

Using the Process Model of Experiential Learning

With the Progress Town Case Study Assessment

I. Planning

Goals: Upon completing this activity participants will be able to develop an assessment procedure, including a rationale for that procedure, to conduct a community needs assessment.

Materials Needed: Copies of the case study

Time: 30 minutes

Size of Group: Approximately 8 to 12 people

Note: This exercise can be changed to reflect the unique community, economic, and political demographics of your area. For example, the Adult and Community Education Director may work for the city council or even a community college. The activity can also be made more elaborate. For example, participants may be asked to produce actual type surveys or phone interview protocols and sampling strategies to collect data.

II. Involvement

Step1: Distribute copies of the Progress Town Assessment to participants. Tell participants they have 10 minutes to read the case study and answer the discussion questions at the end.

Step 2: Ask for volunteers to share their responses, then discuss the simulation with the entire group.

III. Reflection, Generalization, and Application

Conduct a discussion with the entire group to relate the exercise to planning in the real world. To generate discussion, ask for answers to the questions at the end of the exercise. Responses should focus on the specific types of assessments and rationale based on their experiences. Emphasize that the planning, process, and ideas can be used back in the workplace.

IV. Follow-up

Participants may wish to take one or more ideas form this exercise and begin planning an assessment of their own communities.

V. Activity

Each participant should be provided with a copy of the Progress Town Assessment. This can be reproduced or retyped larger to provide more space for writing.

The Progress Town Case Study Assessment

You are the Director of Adult and Community Education in the city of Progress Town. Your staff includes eight full-time area coordinators; each housed in a different area of the city. Each area coordinator has a part-time secretary, a community advisory council and a community volunteer committee.

While the coordinators report directly to you, they must maintain a positive relationship with the school principals in their area since most program activities occur in school facilities and on school grounds. As director you have a goal to expand activities to the facilities and grounds of other local institutions, organizations and agencies. The entire city is serviced through one or another of your area coordinators. It has been common practice for the area coordinators to do some sort of limited needs assessment on their respective areas each semester (usually determining class interests).

Progress Town is a city of 75,000. There is a state university in the town and several industrial plants. Some of the population statistics and demographics include:

- 10 percent unemployment
- 12 percent minority population
- 15 percent over 60 years of age
- 23 percent considered low income
- 30 percent of adults have not completed high school

You and your staff are employed by the town school board. You have been employed as the Director of Adult and Community Education for the past three years. In that time, the school board has refused to authorize expenditures for a community-wide assessment related to your program.

This year the board has just authorized $3,000 for a citywide assessment for the purpose of "gathering data needed to improve the Adult and Community Education Services." You are in charge of this effort and have four months to complete all of the assessment activities. How will you go about achieving this goal?

Discussion Questions

- What type of assessment will you implement, and why?
- What is your rationale for approaching the assessment in this way?
- What do you hope to accomplish with the assessment?
- What other outcomes or difficulties do you anticipate?

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Appendix A -

A Process Model for Experiential Learning In Adult Education

A Process Model for Experiential Learning in Adult Education			
Stage	Leader/Facilitator		Learners' Roles
	Content and Process	Role	
1 **Planning** (Getting Ready)	Assess learners' readiness to participate in experiential learning. Identify desired outcomes and experiential learning methods most appropriate for learners.	Leader prepares the materials and facilities needed for the learning activity.	Not involved at this stage.
2 **Involvement** (Getting Started)	Create a climate for involvement by identifying the relevance of the content, process, and anticipated outcomes of the learning activity for the learners. Create a climate of trust and openness by demonstrating those qualities. Introduce the learning activity and provide clear directions for the learners.	Leader is highly directive at this point, but must be attuned to the reactions and needs of the learners.	Learners should become engaged in the activity at this point; the desired state is one of active interest and involvement.

Stage	Leader/Facilitator		Learners' Roles
	Content and Process	Role	
3 **Internalization** (Learning by Doing)	Help the learners understand the activity by clarifying directions as necessary. Encourage participation when appropriate.	Leader is primarily facilitative at this time, focusing on managing the learning proces. May be directive to help learners keep on task.	Leaners are actively engaged in the learning experience at this stage. They are internalizing the messages of the activity by processing the content and the process while they are doing the activity.
4 **Reflection** (Making Meaning)	Clarify concepts learned or process issues which occurred in the learning activity. Help the learners reflect on the learning activity. Provide encouragement and support for individual learners.	Leader is primarily facilitative, focusing on helping learners process by encouraging discussion. May be directive by providing examples.	Learners strive to derive meaning from the experience. The focus may be on group consensus or individual meaning, or both, depending on the purpose of the activity.
5 **Generalization** (Making Connections)	Help the learners make connections between the learning experience and the rest of the world. For example, the leader may provide examples of connections, analogies, or new ways of thinking about making connections.	Leader is primarily facilitative at this stage, focusing on helping learners develop (possibly through brain-storming) connections between the learning activity and their jobs, communities, etc.	Learners may work independently or in small groups to make connections.

Stage	Leader/Facilitator		Learners' Roles
	Content and Process	Role	
6 Application (Transfer of Learning)	Provide structure/guidance for learners to transfer learning to real world situations. For example, have learners keep a journal of how they have used what they learned on the job.	Leader's role is primarily supportive at this time, helping the learners to make a successful transfer of learning. Leader must also ensure that learners will be recognized for successes and not be penalized for mistakes made when applying new learning.	Learners must be able to use the connections they made in the previous stage and apply their new learning on the job or in their communities, etc.
7 Follow-up (Assessment and Planning)	Assess the learners' abilities to apply their new learning. Use the information gained from assessment to guide individual learners and plan for future learning activities.	Leader's role is primarily directive at this time and may involve the use of formal assessment tools (tests, performance evaluations, etc.) or informal evaluation procedures (such as observation and discussion with the learners).	Not involved at this stage.

Figure 1.1: A Process Model for Experiential Learning in Adult Education